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Studying Discourse Innovations: The Case of the Indigenous Movement in Ecuador

Philipp Altmann*

Abstract: »Diskurs-Innovationen: Der Fall der Indigenenbewegung in Ecuador«. Discursive development is fluid and continuous, making it hard to determine the concrete moment of discursive change or innovation. The disruptive moment of the introduction, disappearance or reformulation of a central political concept can allow a closer definition of this moment of change, its context and its direction. The analysis of political concepts within a given discourse can contribute to the definition of discursive actors, specific texts that introduce the concept in question and its trajectory within a social movement or the society as such. This is exemplified in the indigenous movement in Ecuador. This movement underwent a considerable discursive change in the 1970s and 1980s, a renovation that still forms the basis for its central position in national politics today. With this discursive shift, the movement began to understand the indigenous peoples as nationalities with state-like structures that would allow self-determination and give them a right to autonomy. This innovation led to a radical discursive shift with demands for a plurinational and – subsequently – intercultural reorganization of society and state. The new discourse and the political concepts introduced by the movement not only gave it a position to speak from, but also changed the discourse of society and state in Ecuador.

Keywords: Ecuador, political concepts, indigenous movement, intercultural, plurinational, Buen Vivir, discourse analysis, history of concepts.

1. Introduction: Discourse Analysis, Political Concepts and Innovation

Discursive change is fluid and gradual, and thus hard to grasp in concrete terms. While it might be obvious that something is changing, it can be difficult to define what exactly changes and how it does so – all the more so if the leading question is whether this change also constitutes an innovation. Discourse analysis deals with this problem of change and innovation in two opposing ways: either it focuses on big changes over a long time, as Michel Foucault and his disciples do, or it focuses on small changes in everyday language, as is the

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approach of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (see further Blommaert and Bulcaen 2000). Approaches that are close to Foucault, for instance the Sociology of Knowledge approach to discourse developed by German sociologist Reiner Keller, are “interested in larger societal and historical meaning-making or questions of power/knowledge” (Keller 2012, 51) and focus on “power effects in a conflict-ridden network of social actors, institutional dispositifs, and knowledge stocks” (Keller 2012, 59). For them, discourse analysis is about discursive practices in society. Therefore, their conception of change and innovation is one of “the appearance of central breaking or turning points in the history of social constitutions of subjectivities or particular orders of practice” (Keller 2012, 52). Their research always refers to big changes that potentially affect everyone in a given society. More linguistically inspired approaches like CDA “direct discourse research mainly to ‘unmask’ the ideological functions of language in use or to discover and ‘heal’ situations of ‘asymmetrically biased communication’ and ‘disorders of discourse’” (Keller 2012, 51). In this approach, “remarkably little time is spent on resources and other ‘macro’ conditions on the production and distribution of discourse” (Blommaert and Bulcaen 2000, 448); therefore, “it does not (and does not seek to) grasp larger historical processes of knowledge circulation” (Keller 2012, 51). These approaches target small changes that can be described precisely.

One possibility for analyzing middle-scale discursive change may be a methodological focus on central concepts of different discourses, their appearance or disappearance, development, and change. Central political concepts can be good indicators for change in political discourses and, as such, parts of discursive innovation. Therefore, this study will attempt a combination of discourse analysis and conceptual history – in a pragmatic manner, that is, leaving the discussions about the differences in the conceptualization of language, reality and politics aside. A concept-centered discourse analysis could be a way of providing Foucaultian discourse analysis with a concrete unit of analysis while maintaining the perspective on power and knowledge that conceptual history usually lacks.

Following the division of the study of innovation into the three levels of *semantics* (the construction of sense of innovations and their communication), *pragmatics* (the social use of innovations) and *grammatics* (the institutionalization of innovations) (Rammert 2010, 12), the focus on conceptual innovations allows us to (1) analyze the *introduction* of new political concepts that are manifestations of new and/or already existing demands and ideas, generally through a small group of persons that can be considered (organic) intellectuals; (2) the *diffusion* of those new concepts within a given political discourse, that is, their acceptance by a larger organization or political party; and (3) the *relation* of the new concepts to other concepts and contents of a given discourse – always in the threefold fashion explained above. Political concepts will be understood here as (a) *abstract*, (b) connected to *demands*, (c) *central* to the

discourse of a given movement, (d) *contested* within and outside of the movement and (e) with a *history* within the movement.¹

Discursive changes will be understood here as innovations. Those can be seen in an adaptation of Godin's (2008, 44) thoughts as inventions that are successful and diffused. Therefore, a creative and intentional act of invention – which can happen through imitation, as Godin (2008, 13) states – becomes accepted in discourse, that is, it gets reproduced and integrated into the rules of discourse. It is the moment of the transition between the idea or invention and its implementation or diffusion in discourse that presents a problem for discourse analysis. The moment of transition happens inside a "black-box" for this approach: It is virtually impossible to describe the actual process of integration of an innovation into discourse. Nevertheless, concept-centered discourse analysis enables the processes of both invention and innovation to be determined in a much more exact manner than other branches of discourse analysis permit. This slight change of focus gives the approach of a concept-centered discourse analysis the edge: The breaks in discourse that other approaches can detect, but not analyze per se (instead seeing them as the end of one discourse and the beginning of another), can be homed in on much more precisely, permitting a break to be actually understood as an innovation, as a change that facilitates better adaptation to a changed (discursive) environment.

As concepts are central parts of discourses, a change in their definition or use or the appearance of a new concept can indicate an innovation within this discourse. This relatively easy way of tracing the appearance, disappearance or change of a given concept allows a connection to be made to a specific branch of innovation studies, namely Christensen's (2013) distinction between sustaining and disruptive innovations.² A sustaining innovation is understood here as the introduction of a new concept or the renewal of an old one inside a given discourse without deep discursive change or epistemic break, and the latter as a disruptive innovation, manifested in completely new contents or demands expressed by concepts that break with the earlier discourse.

The approach outlined above can only be developed in a coherent manner in its application to a concrete case. While most social movements or political parties would work as such a case, the development of the discourse of the indigenous movement in Ecuador offers the complexity not only for a given methodology to be applied, but revised in the process. This is one of the most important social movements in Ecuador, and indeed whole Latin America. Its importance is due to an impressive organizational and discursive development in the 1970s and 1980s that led to an effective bottom-up structure in the na-

¹ A similar definition of central concepts is used by several historians of concepts, for instance Richter (2005, 220).

² Not too far away from Rammert (2010, 22) and his distinction between "*Neuerung*" and "*Innovation*" – translatable as "novelty" and "innovation."

tional indigenous organizations – and therefore a great potential for mobilization – and to an innovative and coherent discourse around the central concepts of indigenous nationalities with the capability and right to autonomous self-determination in their territories within a plurinational state. The movement is mainly composed of indigenous peasants, who have made claims for land their central demand since its first manifestations in the 1920s. The vision of land as a means of production has changed since the 1970s, making space for a reconceptualization of it as culturally defined territory – the starting point for the discursive renovation and conceptual innovation of the 1970s and 1980s that brought with it the appearance of political concepts such as indigenous nationalities and plurinationality. In later years, this discourse was completed by the central concepts of interculturality and the Good Life (*Buen Vivir* or *Sumak Kawsay*), positioning the indigenous movement as the discursive avant-garde in the political sphere in Ecuador and – in part – the world.

This work is based on an analysis of the different publications of the organizations of the indigenous movement in Ecuador, publications that are representative of indigenous political thinking because the conditions of their production are embedded in democratic processes: Generally, these texts are written by elected representatives and approved by their organizations. Interviews and individual texts by indigenous leaders are used to complete this material and other studies in order to contextualize and critique them. These texts are studied with the help of content analysis, identifying central discursive elements developed by the actors that also could be understood as ethno-categories – central political concepts. Those concepts are detectable due to their central position in discourse, that is, they are presented as key demands in different texts and referred to in a range of contexts: They are, indeed, nodal points in discourse.

2. Theoretical Background: Social Movements and Discourse

There are few attempts to analyze discursive practices of social movements. By far most prominent is the approach of framing, inspired by Erving Goffman, which tries to understand “meaning work – the struggle over the production of mobilizing and countermobilizing ideas and meanings” (Benford and Snow 2000, 613). Framing is distinguished from more mechanistic approaches like political opportunity theory, viewing social movements “as signifying agents actively engaged in the production and maintenance of meaning for constituents, antagonists, and bystanders or observers” (Benford and Snow 2000, 613). The central idea is that social movement actors participate in activities that provide things, events, ideas with meaning for the movement – mostly external occurrences are framed into something that relates to the thoughts and actions

of the movement. The results are “collective action frames” (Benford and Snow 2000, 614) – “action-oriented sets of belief and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organization (SMO)” (Benford and Snow 2000, 614). Those frames “are deliberative, utilitarian, and goal directed” (Benford and Snow 2000, 624): They are used in a strategic manner in order to achieve specific purposes.³

Framing can be viewed as an overestimation of the power of influence of individual actors. Compared to discourse analysis, the intentions and concrete actions in the introduction and adaptation of meanings or discursive contents seem to have some importance. Framing is understood as “an active, processual phenomenon that implies agency and contention at the level of reality construction” (Benford and Snow 2000, 614), which is why there is a tendency to understand framing as a unified and consensual process, although that is hardly the case. “It is more useful to think of framing as an internal process of contention within movements with different actors taking different positions” (Gamson and Meyer 1996, 283).

On a theoretical level, framing has some considerable shortcomings. This approach – like most social movement theories – has a heavy bias centered in the Global North: Social movements are understood as actors that “seek to remedy or alter some problematic situation or issue” (Benford and Snow 2000, 616) by applying pressure to state actors via concrete political action. This presupposes the existence of concrete goals that can be reached by influencing certain actors, which are ideally neutral and can in fact be influenced, as well as the existence of functioning state structures or a civil society – things that are far from the reality in most countries of the world.

Bearing those shortcomings in mind, the focus of framing on “the politics of signification” (Benford and Snow 2000, 625) within a complex field of already existing meanings that compete with each other is an approach that can be helpful studying discourse innovations. The strong side of framing – one that is of use for research on social movement discourses – is its focus on “[c]ultural opportunities and constraints” (Benford and Snow 2000, 629) that serve as a base and limit for framing processes. The surroundings of discursive actions are understood as determinants for the concrete form of those actions: “framing processes are affected by a number of elements of the socio-cultural context in which they are embedded” (Benford and Snow 2000, 628).

An approach to the study of social movement discourses in the Global South is yet to be constructed, and similarly the general theoretization of social movements of the Global South is heavily flawed. The most important social theorists openly declare that their work is built upon the European and North-

³ The approach of framing can actually be quite easily connected to the Sociology of Knowledge approach to discourse. Keller himself refers to Gamson and interpretative frames and how they work in discourse (Keller 2012, 67).

American experience and is therefore by definition Eurocentric (Zald 1979, 15). This is important here, because both social movements and their political and discursive strategies in the Global South differ considerably from the situation of the Global North, especially in terms of the divide between state and civil society, rurality and urbanity and the structure of social class and ethnicity. Elements of this approach can be found in an older theory of social movements, resource mobilization theory. While this theory has the same methodological problems of a Eurocentric bias, its focus on organizations within social movements is relatively easily adaptable to other contexts. Resource mobilization theory understands social movements as collective actors that are defined by “a set of opinions and beliefs in a population which represents preferences for changing some elements of the social structure and/or reward distribution of a society” (Zald and McCarthy 1979, 2). The structure of social movements is defined by the “product” they offer, that is, by their goals and the demand that exists in a given society for those goals, the requirements to implement them and the relation between the different goals within a movement (Zald 1979, 12). A social movement is composed of different social movement organizations (SMOs) (Zald 1979, 9). Those organizations identify their “goals with the preferences of a social movement” (Zald and McCarthy 1979, 2) – they offer variants of the general “product” of their social movement. The central position of a given organization in the social movement – and of the social movement in the civil society – can be achieved “through the capture of key symbols” (Zald 1979, 13-4). Those key symbols – material ones like flags or pictures, immaterial ones like songs or concepts – have to articulate the vision of the organization as the one that helps to mobilize followers. If successful, other organizations will “begin to copy the dominant MO or to pattern their program and vision partly to differentiate themselves from the dominant MO” (Zald 1979, 13-4) – key symbols are also products and therefore subject to product differentiation. The competition between social movement organizations and political actors in general “is for symbolic dominance: which SMO has the best programs, tactics, and leaders for accomplishing goals. SMOs attempt to convince sympathizers to follow their lead” (Zald and McCarthy 1979, 3). This is where a connection to discourse analysis is to be found – central political concepts are powerful symbols that express the main demands and ideas of a social movement or an organization. If they are successful – that is, if they are integrated into a broader discourse – they will provoke reactions such as critiques of the concept or the development of other slightly different ones by competing political actors.

3. Methodological Outline: *Sattelzeit*, Discourse Innovations, and Central Political Concepts

Discourses are defined by the rules of production of communicative acts within them (Busse 1987, 222), only traceable by an analysis of the concrete units of meaning they contain. A central position among those contents corresponds to central or basic concepts, understood as “irreplaceable units of the political-social vocabulary” (Leonhard 2004, 83) that form part of the process of constitution of their discourse and only work within this discourse. In this sense, there is a close interrelation between a given discourse and its central concepts. This is why a central concept incorporates the central contents of its discourse and always points to the discourse as a whole, being a representation and manifestation of it (Bruners n.d., 14). Therefore, the analysis of the “points of intersection within the diachronic change of meaning of single words” (Steinmetz 2008, 182) in the sense of classic conceptual history is useful in a panorama of concepts that point to discourses. This implies that the focus is not on the linguistic development of a given word or its concrete definition, but on “a socio-historic contouring of the semantic designations” (Leonhard 2004, 79) – on the communicative uses of this word (Koselleck 2011, 16-7). In short, it is about “basic socio-political and identitarian concepts” (Fernández Sebastián 2007, 167) that are to be understood “both as causal factors and as indicators of historical change” (Koselleck 2011, 8).

With this background, discursive changes or epistemic breaks are traceable by analyzing the introduction, change, or disappearance of concepts central to the discourse studied. In terms of the history of concepts, the major discursive change was the *Sattelzeit* or threshold period “in the revolutionary age between the middle of the eighteenth and the middle of the nineteenth centuries” (Conze 1967, 742), when socio-political concepts that were in use for a long time were replaced by a series of new or renewed concepts. At this time, “a profound change [...] occurred in the meaning of the classical topics (*topoi*) of political discourse” (Koselleck 2011, 9). New words and meanings appeared as manifestations of “a new understanding of the world” (Koselleck 2011, 10), including a change in the meaning of already existing concepts. And those words were used by more people, as “unprecedented numbers of the lower strata consciously entered the speech community of those using political language” (Koselleck 2011, 11). The result was a profound change not only in discourse or political concepts, but also in the “terrain of identities, conforming thus new collective agents” (Fernández Sebastián 2007, 169). Concepts with an identitarian background appeared or changed, representing the surge of new political actors. Those concepts were made abstract in the sense of “collective singulars” – for instance, making “History” out of a multitude of histories – and could therefore easily be imbued with new meaning, leading to a heavy ideologization (Fernández Sebastián

2007, 169; Koselleck 2011, 13). For Koselleck, the *Sattelzeit* triggered a profound change in the characteristics of central concepts. He describes the underlying processes as *Verzeitlichung* (temporalization; their introduction into an intellectual panorama of historic times, including visions of change and progress), *Demokratisierung* (democratization, in the sense of a growing participation of broad parts of the society in political discourse), *Ideologiesierbarkeit* (the possibility for incorporating concepts into ideologies) and, finally, *Politisierung* (politicization of concepts in order to mobilize people) (Koselleck 1996, 60-1; Richter 1997, 28-30). During this big epistemic break, concepts acquired functions they did not previously have, changing not only the concrete concepts, but also the basic rules of discourse – something Foucault would agree with.

At the same time, the profound discursive innovation of the *Sattelzeit* is directly connected to social change. Concrete social facts provoke a discursive innovation because (1) the plausibility of certain words changes because of surprising events, (2) the use of certain concepts in normal communication situations changes and (3) words of other languages are introduced and cause irritation to the host language (Steinmetz 2008, 187-8). New concepts are introduced in a given discourse because they express something better than older concepts do and because they are accepted and used by a large number of speakers within this discourse. They replace old concepts that proved to be inadequate “for designating a new situation” (Koselleck 2011, 21).

This is why this article proposes a multi-fold structure of discursive changes, including *Sattelzeiten* or threshold periods at different levels. Indeed, it would be helpful to add to Koselleck’s macro-*Sattelzeit* a meso- and a micro-level. In this perspective, a meso-*Sattelzeit* would describe the changes in the usage of different, interrelated concepts within a global or national discourse (e.g. “freedom” or “human rights” in the context of the opposition capitalism-communism) due to certain global breaks or developments. A nice example would be Lepenies’s (2008) inquiry into the development of the modern concept of development. At this meso-level, a threshold period could be a concrete event or political project, for instance the political struggle for hegemony over the countries in the Global South after the Second World War. While this meso-level focuses on a small section of a larger discourse, there are also smaller discourses within the global or national discourse, for instance, discourses of academic communities, interest groups or political parties. Therefore, a micro-*Sattelzeit* would describe profound changes in the usage of different, interrelated concepts within the discourse of a political party, a social movement or any other determinate group within society. In each case, the condition for assessing a change – a threshold period or *Sattelzeit* – will be an epistemic break, disruptive innovation or complete change of not only the concrete concepts used by the introduction of new concepts or a redefinition of old ones, but also a change in the discursive rules, bringing other products, demands, ideas or interests into focus.

4. The *Sattelzeit*, or Discursive Break in the Discourse of the Indigenous Movement in Ecuador

Such a micro-*Sattelzeit* is traceable in the discourse of the indigenous movement with an epistemic break between the mid-1970s and the mid-1980s. Until this period, the discourse of this movement was inscribed in a classist perspective mainly defined by communist and socialist tendencies. Therefore, the main demands were material ones; the very first indigenous organization resumed: “the Indians only ask for bread, land, work and freedom” (Conferencia de Cabecillas Indígenas 1935), clarifying that those were things that the USSR granted their peasants, combined with a support for their nationalities or ethnic minorities. While these class-based and material demands formed the main part of the discourse of the indigenous movement of those times reflected by their organizational role as branches of major workers’ unions, the understanding of the indigenous peoples as “national minorities” (Lechón 1976, 85-6) was always present – but mainly as a part of the Marxist-Leninist discourse of national liberation (Lechón 1976, 87-8) promoted by the Communist Party of Ecuador and the Communist International (Comintern) (Becker 2008b, 3-4). The Ecuadorian Federation of Indians (FEI),⁴ the central organization until the mid-1960s, resumes its demands in a text by its president in 1976,

This is why our federation formulates the democratic agrarian reform, the transfer of the land to whom it works, technical and credit support and cooperativism, all that enfram in the liberating, anti-imperialist, anti-feudal and democratic national revolution, until we reach a worker-peasant government that respects our rights (Lechón 1976, 91-2).

Another organization hegemonic in the 1960s and 1970s, the National Federation of Peasant Organizations (FENOC),⁵ started as a Catholic and conservative alternative to the FEI, more closely resembling an open socialism by the end of the 1970s. This organization did not conceptualize indigenous people at all until the mid-1980s – they were simply seen as peasants (FENOCIN 2004, 19).

The beginning of the discursive change within the discourse of the indigenous movement in Ecuador is traceable in a text by the Amazonian organization Federation of Shuar-Centers.⁶ This organization broke with the classist and unionist structures and perspectives of the major indigenous organizations of this time and established a discourse that is based on the defense of culture and territory of the Shuar. In 1976, it published a text that represented a qualitative

⁴ In Spanish: *Federación Ecuatoriana de Indios*.

⁵ In Spanish: *Federación Nacional de Organizaciones Campesinas*. Nowadays, this organization calls itself *Confederación Nacional de Organizaciones Campesinas, Indígenas y Negras* (FENOCIN; National Confederation of Peasant, Indigenous and Black Organizations).

⁶ In Spanish: *Federación de Centros Shuar* (FICSH).

step in the discursive development of the FICSH. While earlier texts (like Federación de Centros Shuar (1981), originally published in 1973) stuck to defensive political vindication, demanding respect of their territory from state and enterprises, their demands in 1976 went beyond the narrow limits of discursive self-defense and for the first time proposed a general social and political change that diverged from indigenous thinking:

The Shuar-Federation is the union of the energies of an American indigenous group that wants to survive and stand its ground in spite of a new environmental situation that is hostile to it everywhere. Therefore, its end is a clear one: the self-determination of the Shuar-group within a new concept of a pluralist Ecuadorian State. Without that possibility of self-determination, any effort of the kind that has been undertaken would not go much beyond a more-or-less modern and self-directed method of integration and even assimilation to the dominant group. That means: it would end in another marginalization and then in the biological death of the group (Federación de Centros Shuar 1976, 129).

This manifestation of a micro-*Sattelzeit* is to be understood as a major discursive shift within the discourse and the structure of the indigenous movement. Since the mid-1970s a change has occurred in the conditions of the possibilities of knowledge (as Busse (1987, 223) paraphrases Foucault) and with it, the conditions of the use of concepts. While this change did not bring with it immediate conceptual innovations,⁷ it created the conditions, imaginaries and discursive contents necessary for the appearance of new or renewed concepts.

This change cannot be reduced to a slight shift in the goals of the movement – akin to the goals remaining the same but being expressed differently. Instead, the appearance of ethnic and cultural demands in an autonomy-based platform has to be considered an epistemic break and discursive innovation – in this case, the beginning of a micro-*Sattelzeit* or threshold period. On the level of the study of innovations, we can talk about a disruptive innovation, given that the introduction of ethnicity-based claims that go well beyond a strategic use “helps create a new market and value network, and eventually goes on to disrupt an existing market and value network” (Christensen 2013). If we accept the premise of resource mobilization theory to consider movement goals as “products,” new goals have to be understood as an innovation in the offer of products. The ethnic turn in the discourse of the indigenous movement is a clear break with the “products” previously offered. The new, ethnicity-based claims “don’t attempt to bring better products to established customers in existing markets. Rather, they disrupt and redefine that trajectory by introducing products and services that are not as good as currently available products” (Christensen 2013).

⁷ With the exception of the concepts of “self-determination” and “pluralism” that were later associated as secondary concepts of larger political-identitarian concepts and never worked as stand-alone political concepts in this discourse at all.

The discursive break meant a profound change in the rules of discourse, enabling new concepts to emerge (Busse 1987, 225). The new discursive contents were expressed rather quickly in new central concepts. The first concept that appeared to express the demands for autonomy based on the claim that the indigenous peoples already have the necessary structures to self-govern was the concept of indigenous nationalities, which came into use in Ecuador in the late 1970s. This concept has had a pre-history in communist organizations, taking its impetus from the politics of the nationalities of the USSR and diffused by Comintern in the 1930s (Becker 2011). The co-development of socialist/communist and indigenous organizations in this period (Becker 2008b, 37-8) facilitated discursive transfers and enabled a situation where “indigenous nationalities had become a common part of communist discourse” (Becker 2011, 196). In the context of the communist discourse of national liberation, the concept of indigenous nationalities with a barely defined right to self-determination was used as some kind of strategic essentialism embedded in economic and politic demands that did not reflect ethnicity (Becker 2011, 195-7). Nevertheless, cultural aspects were taken into account to an extent – something that contributed to the renovation of this concept much later.

The reintroduction of the political concept of indigenous nationality as a manifestation of the new discursive contents happened in the late 1970s in the city of Otavalo, marked by an indigenous majority in its population. Two Marxist anthropologists, Ileana Almeida and Yuri Zubritsky, used this concept to understand the special condition of indigenous peoples in Ecuador. Zubritsky, a Soviet national and teacher of Almeida, phrased his analysis in clear terms: “The great indigenous mass is still living not only under the yoke of a harsh exploitation, but also in conditions of an oppressed nationality” (Zubritsky, in Almeida 1979, 14). The qualitative innovation of the reintroduction of the concept of indigenous nationalities for both anthropologists is that it “allows the ethnic group of the kechua to be placed in a ‘historical’ process” (Almeida 1979, 14). For Almeida, a nationality is defined by its language, its territory, its economic structures and its culture,⁸ marking a step in the presupposed development from ancient “tribe” to capitalist “nation” (Almeida 1979, 15). The clear place of those two discursive pioneers on the political left facilitated the reintroduction of the concept of indigenous nationalities on the non-indigenous left, including socialist parties and workers’ unions (Becker 2011, 198).

It is striking that this political concept of indigenous nationalities was revived in the context of the second meeting of Barbados 1977, the first author being the co-organizer of those meetings, the Mexican anthropologist Guillermo Bonfil Batalla. Just after the meeting, he wrote about nationalities as “human groups that possess an own basic identity, historically established, able to

⁸ Being rather close to the discursive residues of the original communist introduction of this concept (as in: Lechón 1976, 85-6).

constitute autonomous social unities” (Bonfil Batalla 1977, 98). With this, the new concept was introduced into a sub-discourse – engaged anthropology – and defined repeatedly, seemingly without any direct connection to its establishment in Ecuador.

In 1980, two important indigenous organizations⁹ were created that both integrated the concept of indigenous nationalities in their name (Becker 2011, 200). Still, it took some years to place this new concept in the developing discourse of ethnic autonomy. A major leap occurred in a special edition of the national journal *Cuadernos de Nueva* in 1983, where indigenous leaders and academics discussed the situation of indigenous peoples in Ecuador. Here, the non-indigenous sociologist Jorge León describes minoritarian ethnic groups that try to re-encounter their past and traditions and by this develop a historical project converting them into nationalities.

A nationality is in general that population that considers to belong to a common cultural, economic, political past and that considers itself to have the right to control over a territory and to self-determination or at least vindicates a project common to the ethnic group (León 1983, 8).

The following year, 1984, a young indigenous leader, Nina Pacari, was the first to define the concept of indigenous nationalities in the complex discursive environment of the indigenous movement. Pacari was at that time a leading figure in the regional indigenous organization in Otavalo and had contacts with Almeida and Zubritski. In her understanding, the Kichwa nationality is “product of a long historic development that had as a result the surge of state elements” (Pacari 1984, 115-6). The development towards a Kichwa nation-state was interrupted by the Spanish invasion (Pacari 1984, 116). Nevertheless, the internal structures of the Kichwa persisted, making this people an indigenous nationality, “a people with a common language, a common culture, a common territory and common economic ties” (Pacari 1984, 115). In this context, Pacari introduced other contents into the discursive field around the concept of indigenous nationalities: She highlights the central position of indigenous social structures that differ considerably from the social, political and economic structures of the Global North, especially in the reference to the ideal of a harmony between person, community, society and nature or universe (Pacari 1984, 115). With this, a spiritual aspect is introduced into the discourse of the indigenous movement on a national level – and this at a moment where socialist convictions were still prominent within the movement. At the same time, Pacari makes clear that the indigenous movement tries to focus on what later was called “the ‘double dimension’ of class and ethnic aspects of the indigenous

⁹ The Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon (*Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas de la Amazonía Ecuatoriana*, CONFENIAE) and the Coordination Council of the Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (*Consejo de Coordinación de las Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador*, CONACNIE), predecessor of CONAIE.

struggle” (Becker 2008, 168), combining demands for self-determination (Pacari 1984, 115) with calls for unity with the exploited of the country (Pacari 1984, 118-9), which led to an equalization between the exploitation as a class and the oppression as a nationality (Pacari 1984, 121). She is also one of the first indigenous leaders of the Andean highlands to conceptualize the role of territories for the indigenous peoples, demanding

That for each one of the nationalities the property of their territory is recognized and guaranteed, registering it in a collective, inalienable and sufficiently extensive in order to assure their demographic growth and their cultural development (Pacari 1984, 122).

The second central political concept seems like a logical next step toward the concept of indigenous nationalities. In order to install a regime of local autonomies, a “pluralist” (Federación de Centros Shuar 1976, 129) system needs to be established. Based on the conceptual development of the central concept of indigenous nationalities, another central concept was established. In the first half of the 1980s, the concept of plurinationality was introduced into the discourse of the indigenous movement in Ecuador. This time, the first moment of the introduction was the already mentioned special edition of *Cuadernos de Nueva*. There, Jorge León defines what an indigenous nationality is in order to come to a rather clear conclusion:

These populations demand recognition in their manifestations of diversity, something that implies also the right to autonomy. Whatever the political regime of a new State might be: multinational (the nationalities are not only recognized, but they share the centers of decision) or multiethnic (the diverse ethnic groups have the right to the recognition of their particularities: language, education, customs, agrarian and communitarian organization, etc.), federative or other, the ethnic problem demands to admit the diverse, to live together with the different and even conflictive (León 1983, 8).

The diagnosis of another sociologist publishing in this volume, Manuel Chiriboga, is similar, only that he already uses the term “plurinational” in order to designate this new type of state to come (Chiriboga 1983, 123). The groundbreaking article by Nina Pacari introduced the demand for a “multinationality” (Pacari 1984, 119) as opposed to an integration of the diverse into a unified nation-state. In her words, the indigenous movement fights for “the creation of a veritable multinational and pluricultural state in which each nationality has the right to self-determination and to the free choice of social, political and cultural alternatives” (Pacari 1984, 119).

The concept of multi- or plurinationality also has a background in the discourse developed by the group of Barbados and different indigenous movements in the 1970s. After the second meeting of Barbados, Bonfil Batalla expresses the need he sees for “multiethnic or multinational states” (Bonfil Batalla 1977, 98) where both ethnic and class aspects can be respected within a regime of autonomies. This state of “plurinational character” (Bonfil Batalla

1977, 99) could be a result of the “fight of decolonization” (Bonfil Batalla 1977, 98) of the indigenous nationalities. Marie-Chantal Barre reports the use of this political concept in the indianist movements in Bolivia around the year 1980 (Barre 1982, 74).

The diffusion of the renewed discourse around the central political concepts of indigenous nationalities and plurinationality found its substantive expression and came to completion with the foundation of the CONAIE¹⁰ in 1986 (Becker 2008, 167), the first national indigenous organization that based its discourse on those concepts. CONAIE used “the discourse of nationalities as an organizing tool” (Becker 2008, 173)¹¹ and was able to deploy it as a successful mobilization method. After this moment, the discursive development enters a phase of consolidation, providing the new concepts with major definition and ideas for their concrete application. The Law of Indigenous Nationalities, entered in the parliamentary discussion by the Socialist Party in 1988 – where it was immediately postponed – is the first public presentation of the new demands of the indigenous movement. In it, “CONAIE declared that the republic of Ecuador was a plurinational state, and it argued that the government must recognize indigenous territoriality, organization, education, culture, medicine, and judicial systems” (Becker 2008, 172). Both central political concepts, plurinationality and indigenous nationalities, were used in a coherent presentation of concrete political demands, already in the form of a law that could be approved. Even if this proposal of a law was diffused by the Socialist Party and published by the parliament, it was not received or discussed – a phenomenon that still persists today.

Therefore, the national indigenous uprising of the *Inti Raymi* 1990 was a double surprise for the political sphere and the civil society in Ecuador: Not only were the indigenous peoples able to mobilize enough members to block the capital Quito for several weeks, but they were able to present a catalogue of 16 demands comprising ethnic, citizen, and class issues and representing a coherent and inclusive discourse that addresses also non-indigenous groups (León 1994, 61). The first point of this catalogue was the reform of the first article of the constitution where Ecuador would be declared a plurinational state (León 1994, 19). Starting with the *Inti Raymi* of 1990, the indigenous movement entered a cycle of mobilization with major actions every two years. This necessitated a comprehensive manifesto of the political ideas of the central organization, the CONAIE, something that was accomplished in 1994 with their Political Project (CONAIE 1994). The publication of the Political Project can be understood

¹⁰ Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador, *Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador*.

¹¹ Whether CONAIE actually “exploited ethnic identities to press an economic agenda” (Becker 2008, 170) – or if this type of strategic essentialism was not so strategic, as the construction of ethnic political and social structures indicates, is worthy of a discussion in itself.

as the end of this phase of discursive consolidation: CONAIE comes to a series of clear definitions and demands that have remained constant since then.¹²

5. Counter-Concepts and Opposing Concepts. The Struggle over Hegemony within Discourse

The consolidation of a new coherent discourse with a set of central political concepts brings with it the construction of what Koselleck coined asymmetrical counter-concepts, referring to the construction of opposites that mark a discursive outside or other (Junge 2011, 10-1).¹³ “They are means of attributing things to other people, to those who do not belong to our group, through a binary conceptualization heavily unilateral and derogatory that reduces them to a purely negative semantic field” (Koselleck in Fernández Sebastián and Fuentes 2006, 125). An example would be the opposition of monarchy and democracy in the late eighteenth century (Koselleck 2011, 14). This kind of counter-concept creates a good impression “for whose benefit or for which purposes (*cui bono*) a concept is used” (Koselleck 2011, 17) and by that, a quite concrete idea of “a given concept’s status within a social order, or the parameters of a political confrontation” (Koselleck 2011, 23). The study of counter-concepts is therefore one step toward a more holistic discourse analysis (Koselleck 2011, 33).

The construction of counter-concepts becomes increasingly important with the consolidation of the new discourse. While they were largely absent in the first formulations of the new indigenous discourse, as in Pacari’s text, where she opposes multinationality with integration rather superficially (Pacari 1984, 119), the Political Project of 1994 bases its argumentative structure on the construction of counter-concepts. The absolute other against which the project of plurinationality is directed is defined as “the Bourgeois Uninational State, hegemonic in its juridical-political and economic nature, [which] is exclusive, antidemocratic, repressive and pro-imperialist” (CONAIE 1994, 6). In this uninational system, the principles of democracy have not been respected (CONAIE 1994, 6)¹⁴ and the public institutions have been “instruments of the dominant sector” (CONAIE 1994, 18) since the foundation of the state. This is why the state structures are working in a deficient manner, being “inefficient, corrupt, immoral, segregationist and antidemocratic” (CONAIE 1994, 18). This more general construction of the uninational state as a counter-concept to plurinationality is at the same time an offer of alliances with non-indigenous

¹² The Political Project was updated in 1997 and 2001.

¹³ Junge claims that concepts are originated at the same time as their counter-concepts (Junge 2011, 25). In this text, we will argue that concepts are constructed with some ‘other’ in mind – but that this ‘other’ is usually not condensed into the form of a concept.

¹⁴ CONAIE speaks of a “false representative democratic system” (CONAIE 1994, 12).

sectors, namely peasants and workers. Considering ethnicity, a later text of CONAIE defines the project of the uninational state as one that “promotes civil equality under the condition of a renunciation of cultural particularity” (CONAIE 1997, 9). It parts from the idea of a single nation in the sense of the European ideal of nation-state and invisibilizes other ethnic groups. This part of the counter-concept of a uninational state is helpful in including other ethnic groups, such as Afro-descendants, in the fight for a plurinationality.

Plurinationality is opposed to uninationality because it represents the real situation in the Ecuadorian society and therefore is the condition for a real democracy (CONAIE 1994, 6). The installation of a plurinational society and state would be “the transformation of the nature of the present power of the Uninational State” (CONAIE 1994, 7), in short a “New Democracy” (CONAIE 1994, 12). The leading principle of this renewed state would be the motto of “unity in diversity” (CONAIE 1994, 13), that is the defense of the particularities combined with a systematic collaboration and integration, as opposed to the segregationism attributed to the uninational state.

In the fight for discursive dominance within a social movement, something appears that has not been conceptualized clearly by the history of concepts: a phenomenon that will be called here “opposing concept.” This is more than “a conceptual weapon of combat (*Kampfbegriff*) that challenged the feasibility of opponents’ proposals” (Koselleck 1996, 68). An opposing concept is constructed as an alternative to a dominant political concept, sharing at least some of the main discursive contents of it. In general, it has to be considered a disruptive innovation, as it is directed towards a partly different target group, lacking at the same time the degree of discursive precision the opposed political concept has.

The second biggest national indigenous organization, the FENOCIN, reorganized itself in 1995 and opened its strictly peasant and unionist framework to ethnic contents (FENOCIN 1999, 103). The renewed discourse was constructed around topics of sustainable development with identity, equality and democracy (FENOCIN 1999, 13), expressed in the central political concept of interculturality (FENOCIN 1999, 53). The main idea of this new political concept remains unclear; more prominent was the attempt to “strengthen the particular identities, at the same time as constructing the interculturality” (FENOCIN 2004, 20). It refers to an integration and wide participation of different ethnic groups in the organization (FENOCIN 1999, 127) and the country as such, in the sense of a “project of the country” (FENOCIN 2004, 39). The most detailed definition of interculturality is that FENOCIN “tries to build up a pluricultural country, in which differences are respected but at the same time pluricultural organisms are created and an intercultural thinking that give it viability” (FENOCIN 1999, 103). This system is supposed to include “the autonomy of the indigenous and Afroecuadorian societies” (FENOCIN 1999, 150).

The background of the concept of interculturality is unclear. While there have been discussions on this concept in academia and social movements since

the 1970s in the Global North (and – to some extent – the Barbados Group), there are no direct connections to Ecuador detectable. An entry-point could be indigenous education, a central project of the indigenous movement since its very beginnings. Such education was pushed quite considerably after the return to democracy at the end of the 1970s that brought with it many state projects in development and education. In this context, the name “intercultural bilingual education” came into use. So, when FENOCIN declared itself to be intercultural, this term was associated with the successful experience of indigenous education.

As an opposing concept, interculturality defines its “other,” namely the concept of plurinationality, in distinct terms. CONAIE and its more ethnicist members are understood as “ethnic fundamentalists that only empathize ethnic differences and don’t give any value to interculturality” (FENOCIN 1999, 150), or other categories of analysis, such as: class, gender, or region. Even so, the FENOCIN recognizes that ethnicism did achieve important things – above all, the highlighting of the problems of ethnicity, including questions of autonomy and collective rights – in order to show “the inexistence of a nation” (FENOCIN 1999, 150) and a homogeneous state in Ecuador. But the concept of indigenous nationalities attached to their territories is criticized by the FENOCIN and their opposing concept of interculturality, understanding the idea of an ethnically defined territoriality as a “straitjacket for sectors that have non-continuous territorialities” (FENOCIN 1999, 153) that does not comprehend the pluriethnic reality or the existence of “multiethnic territorialities” (FENOCIN 1999, 153-4) in most parts of Ecuador. Interculturality, in contrast, allows the acceptance of flexible or multiple ethnic identities with different relationships to territory. The recognition of this multitude of ethnic identities is understood as “an opportunity to forge a strategic alliance and further interculturality” (FENOCIN 1999, 156). It should be operationalized with a complex system of juridical, political, educational etc. pluralities, permitting everyone to live according to their cultural identity. The different spheres of these pluralities should be connected systematically, for instance, providing in each case a deep knowledge of the other cultural systems (FENOCIN 1999, 156). In the same sense, ethnic autonomy according to the political concept of interculturality has to be open and flexible, not tied unilaterally to a given territory and connected to the rest of the nation via clearly defined structures of intercultural contact (FENOCIN 1999, 157). The solution can be found in ethnic “circumscriptions” (FENOCIN 1999, 159) instead of territories, allowing for pluriethnic variants.

Interculturality cannot be reduced to a simple opposing concept that criticizes plurinationality. As a political concept it defines a proper counter-concept it is directed against, described in less concrete terms than plurinationality does with the uninational state. FENOCIN talks about the project of “the power, the exclusion, the rigor and submission under the international creditors that destroys the social capital, the ethnic values, the identity and the confidence between the Ecuadorians” (FENOCIN 2004, 27) that is fighting for the control of

the future of Ecuador. In this project, the rights of indigenous and Afroecuadorian peasants are disrespected “under the concept of ‘ethnic minorities’” (FENOCIN 2004, 29). Opposed to this project of the elite is the project of the people, the fight for “participation and hope to forge in our country an intercultural flexible and democratic social context” (FENOCIN 2004, 29). The counter-concept for interculturality is therefore defined in broad terms, allowing for alliances with basically all groups in society.

Those characteristics make interculturality a much more open or empty concept than plurinationality. It is easier for broad sectors of society to identify with it or to fill it with the contents they prefer without creating open contradictions. Interculturality lacks a strict definition which allows it to reflect the most diverse ideas (Steinmetz 2008, 189-90). This is why interculturality was accepted quickly in the political discourse of non-indigenous sectors – something that never happened with plurinationality, a concept largely identified with the indigenous movement and, more precisely, CONAIE as its main agent.

This openness of the concept of interculturality led to its quick integration not only into the discourse of non-indigenous actors, but also into the discourse of CONAIE itself. Just few years after its first introduction, interculturality was integrated into the already established discourse of CONAIE – but as a merely secondary concept at the side of plurinationality. CONAIE defines it like that: “The Plurinational State supports interculturality as a flow and interinfluence of values in a double direction” (CONAIE 1997, 17). It is supposed to be an enhancement to plurinationality, focusing more on the connection of the autonomous spheres, the latter being the main content of plurinationality. Therefore, interculturality in the definition of FENOCIN is to be considered a disruptive innovation, discarding parts of the established discourse,¹⁵ while interculturality in the definition of CONAIE is clearly a sustaining innovation, maintaining the discourse while extending it to broader groups. Interculturality is a clear case of a highly contested political concept – a concept that is used by different actors with different definitions that share some common ground. This is why interculturality is usually understood “not as a duty of the whole society but as a reflex of the cultural condition of the indigenous world” (Walsh 2000, 11), being stripped of its main contents in both interpretations.

Another opposing concept appears some years later. In the years after 2000 a new concept enters the discourse of the indigenous movement. *Sumak Kawsay*, *Buen Vivir* or Good Life takes its impetus from a local indigenous organization of the Amazon, Sarayaku. The indigenous intellectual Carlos Viteri Gualinga, born and raised in Sarayaku, published a text in 2002 where he concludes that there is no indigenous conception of development. Rather, the indigenous peoples have “a holistic vision of what should be the objective or

¹⁵ In terms of Christensen, interculturality is among the “simpler, more convenient, and less expensive products that appeal to new or less-demanding customers” (Christensen 2013).

mission of every human effort, consisting in searching for and creating the material and spiritual condition to build up and maintain the ‘Good Life,’ that is also defined as ‘harmonious life’” (Viteri 2002, 1). In this vision, the earth and the jungle provide a link between the spiritual and the material, mediated through indigenous wise persons (Viteri 2002, 3). This concept is, as a general idea, a central part of the indigenous cosmovision – but new as a political concept. Its basis is local knowledge, transmitted through the generations, which allows an adequate adaptation to the environment (Viteri 2002, 2). For Viteri, the construction of the Good Life – both as a concept and a political ideal – is a sign of the openness of culture and the possibility to renew certain parts of a given culture by adapting external structures (Viteri 2002, 5). Even if there are no explicit references, there is a discursive background of this concept, both in Ecuador, where it was used in two texts in 1993 and received no resonance, and Bolivia, where the concept of *Suma Qamaña* or Good Life has been diffused since the year 2000.

Just one year later, in 2003, the local organization in Sarayaku issued a manifesto fighting against the exploitation of petrol and other natural resources in their territory, the “Book of Life of Sarayaku to defend our future.”¹⁶ In it, the proposal of the central concept of Good Life is deeply embedded in the discourse around the concept of plurinationality, including issues of autonomy and territoriality (Sarayaku 2003, 1). It is extended by explicitly spiritual contents, making the principle of Good Life a way of life in accordance to the will of the gods and cosmic rules that have been revealed through traditional indigenous wise persons (Sarayaku 2003, 3). Those rules of the Good Life are directly tied to a given territory where the people in question have lived for generations (Sarayaku 2003, 3-4). The organization of Sarayaku is the first to establish a concrete political program on how to reach their ideal of Good Life, translated as “life in plenty” (Sarayaku 2003, 10) and “life in harmony” (Sarayaku 2003, 26). They propose a protection of their territory as “zone of biological, cultural and historical interest for the country and the humanity” (Sarayaku 2003, 26) with high degrees of autonomous self-determination and the establishment of different zones of protection within that territory.

This new concept was defined and fought for by the Amazonian organizations that traditionally are closer to ethnic political thinking. Even if the discourse of the Andean organizations is not far removed (as in Pacari 1984), they needed quite some time to accept Good Life in their own discourse. It could be argued that Good Life is an opposing concept on another level than interculturality: It is not directed against plurinationality as such – indeed identifying itself with this concept – but rather against a macro-political and socialist interpretation of plurinationality that was prevailing around the year 2000. As an

¹⁶ In Spanish and Kichwa: “Sarayaku Sumak Kawsayta Ñawpakma Katina Killka”/ “El libro de la vida de Sarayaku para defender nuestro future.”

opposing concept, Good Life highlights the local and originally ethnic aspects of the political thinking of the indigenous movement, trying to condense political ideas that are constructed as genuinely indigenous.

It remained within a rather small and closed sector of the discourse of the indigenous movement until the profound political changes caused by the appearance of Rafael Correa and his party, Alianza PAÍS in 2005. Their first electoral program included a different definition of the Good Life concept. One of their programmatic points is “Good Life in harmony with nature, under an unrestricted respect of human rights” (Alianza PAÍS 2006, 3/10). The introduction of Good Life in the discussion on a new constitution in 2007 and its installation into the constitution of 2008 meant its diffusion not only in a broader discourse of the whole society but also its positioning as a central concept in the discourse of the indigenous movement. By this, the discursive shift envisioned by the Amazonian organizations, in concrete, the further inclusion of ethnic and spiritual contents, succeeded. CONAIE started to talk about their fight for “a society that promotes the ‘Good Life’ transmitted through the generations by our old taitas and mamas, a society that recovers the teachings of its ancestral peoples and that can live in harmony with our Pacha Mama” (CONAIE 2007, 1).

As such, Good Life can be understood not as a disruptive, but as a sustaining innovation, renovating and sharpening certain parts of an existing discourse while others are relegated to a secondary position. This is why this political concept is probably the best summary of the whole discourse of the indigenous movement, highlighting the hegemonic parts defined by CONAIE – and therefore useful in the discursive fights within the movement.

It is interesting to note that with this last innovation the indigenous movement entered into a phase of discursive crisis. After the discussions in turn of the constitution, all indigenous organizations seem to be unable to issue programmatic texts or criticize more than concrete political decisions in a passive and ad-hoc manner. The continuous process of discursive innovation seems to have come to an end – something that has not happened since the 1970s.

6. Conclusion: Detecting Discursive Innovations through the Analysis of Political Concepts

Political discourses change and innovate constantly. This permanent process of innovation not only happens due to external influences, making political parties or social movements passive actors that can only “frame” certain problems using those influences. They are much more discursive agents that – by themselves – can start, import or ignore discursive developments, converting themselves into actors of discursive innovation. A good way to investigate discursive innovation in organizations is to analyze the appearance of political concepts, defined as concepts that contain a large part of the discourse they are

embedded in and by that become manifestations for the demands of the organization in question.

The investigation of innovations as such is a methodological problem. It can as a result be hard to study innovations, as their definition is necessarily open and pluralistic, and therefore very basic. It is helpful to distinguish the central dimensions of time, facts and social understanding of them (as in Rammert 2010, 8-12), but as social scientists we are limited to a study of their consequences. Innovations are only of social relevance – they are only innovations in the strict sense (Godin 2008, 44) – if they have an effect on “the transformation of the rules of institutional regimes” (Rammert 2010, 22). These transformations become very visible if the innovation in question is a disrupting one, in the sense of Christensen (2013).

In the context of this study, a discursive innovation is easily detectable if there is a change in the central concepts around which a given discourse is constructed. If this change is a disruptive one, that is, if the new or renewed concepts differ considerably in their contents, it can be a manifestation of a discursive break. Nevertheless, such a discursive break can only be sustained if the renewed discourse around the political concept in question is consolidated, that is, both integrated in public expressions by the political actors and further defined in texts issued by the actor that do not necessarily have a wide diffusion. Sustaining innovations, that is, political concepts that do not break with the existing discourse but rather extend it to other groups, are a fundamental part of this consolidation.

The approach of concept-centered discourse analysis allows a sustaining research of the development of discourses on a meso-level, precisely focused on central political concepts that contain the main parts of the discourse in question. Their introduction, development and change makes it possible for conclusions to be drawn about the discursive development as such – a development that is much harder to grasp. The study of counter-concepts and opposing concepts of those central concepts means a further deepening of the investigation, including constructions of the political other or of other, rejected ways of reaching the relevant goals of a movement. This multitude of dimensions leads to a comprehensive and holistic investigation of discursive change and innovation.

The study of discursive innovations in the sense of a concept-centered discourse analysis is not free of the pre-political conceptualizations that both discourse analysis and history of concepts have. It is about the hope that a study of the development of units of meaning allows us to criticize both the units and the meaning they contain. Koselleck dreamed of “a degree of *semantic control* over the use of [social and political] language today [...] such historical clarification may lead to a more enlightened political discourse” (Koselleck 2011, 16). Maybe it is naïve to dream that dream of discursive fairness – nevertheless, it is a worthwhile enterprise.

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